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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000536

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [CASC](#) [KPAO](#) [DJ](#)

SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI: FOUR INJURED IN ANTI-WAR DEMONSTRATIONS

Classified By: RSO MARC RAMOS FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Four people have been injured, two seriously, in three days of anti-war student demonstrations in Djibouti City. Two local students were seriously wounded when local police fired on demonstrators on March 24; they remain hospitalized. In addition, two German soldiers were injured on the same day while driving by a demonstration by local university and high school students. Although the demonstrators, virtually all students, reportedly have sought to march on the U.S. Embassy, local police have restricted them to the downtown area. The demonstrations, occurring successively on March 23, 24, and 25, have ranged in number from 100 to 600 people and have lasted approximately 5 hours each day. Local press coverage has included graphic visuals, perhaps inciting the demonstrators. The extensive press coverage of the demonstrations themselves suggests that at least the first was government-sanctioned. However, as the gatherings have continued, they have begun to take on a slight anti-government coloring. Local security officials expect demonstrations to continue, and perhaps to become more violent, as U.S. forces approach Baghdad. End Summary.

STUDENT PROTESTS

2. (SBU) Four people, including two Djiboutian students and two German soldiers, have been injured in anti-war demonstrations occurring on the mornings of March 23, 24, and 25. Local police have restricted the demonstrations to the downtown area, using riot control tactics and tear gas, although reports suggest that the protestors have sought to continue their protests at the U.S. Embassy. The students responded by throwing rocks at the police and vandalizing nearby vehicles. On March 24, police reportedly fired upon the crowd, injuring two students seriously. The two remain hospitalized in serious condition. In addition, U.S. military personnel received a report that two uniformed German soldiers were injured as they drove by one of the demonstrations in a German military vehicle.

3. (C) Students report that the initial demonstrations of March 23 were the direct result of bulletins posted on the university and high school campuses. Students deny that they posted the bulletins themselves or of having knowledge of who did so. Senior FSNs, however, report that they have heard reports that local security forces posted the bulletins. Opposition unionist and high school teacher Souleiman Djama told ConOf that he witnessed clandestine state security personnel posting bulletin announcing demonstrations at a local high school. In a conversation with Conoff, Abdirazak Hassan Guedi, the judiciary council to the Minister of the Interior, denied these claims, calling them rumor. Security field reports indicate that the demonstrations were incited by local Muslim clerics.

MEDIA

4. (U) The state-run newspaper "La Nation" gave front page coverage to the first of the demonstrations on March 23. The front page photo in the March 24th edition pictured marching students waving Iraqi flags and anti-war banners. The opening line of the adjoining article read... "Felt to be unjust and unjustified, the war against Iraq has provoked a general outcry in the entire world." A second cover article on the same day titled "The war of images" spoke to the graphic nature of the television coverage of the war. The article specifically addressed Al-Jazeera pieces, noting that "The war against Iraq is not as clean as we might imagine. Despite the precision of their high technology, smart bombs have caused numerous civilian casualties, the number of which can only rise after every attack."

COMMENT

5. (C) The fact that the demonstrations were covered in the state-run newspaper and television suggests that at least the first demonstration was government-sanctioned. Djibouti is the only Arab League country not to experience immediate anti-war demonstrations; thus, it is likely that the President believed it necessary to demonstrate popular opposition to the war prior to the March 24 Arab League meeting in Cairo. The President made his first critical public statement on March 24, likely to boost his position in Cairo. He opposes the war in Iraq even though he believes there should be regime change, but he fears that demonstrations of any kind will also become anti-government because of the poor state of the Djiboutian economy.

6. (C) The most recent demonstration on March 25th was accompanied

by a police escort and conducted in a peaceable manner; however, the most recent gatherings have begun to take on an anti-government cast.

Embassy personnel and U.S. military continue to monitor the situation around town; all agree that this is only the beginning of what is believed will be many more demonstrations to come. Embassy security contacts have suggested that, due to the graphic media accounts of the war, the potential for violent demonstrations will increase as the fighting nears Baghdad.

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